

Senator Jonathon Duniam
Senator for Tasmania
Committee Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Sent via email - community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Friday 10 November 2017

**RE: SOCIAL SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(HOUSING AFFORDABILITY) BILL 2017**

Dear Senator Duniam,

The Parenthood welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Housing Affordability) Bill 2017 (the Bill)* and contribute to the Senate Committee's inquiry.

The Parenthood is Australia's leading parent advocacy and campaigning organisation with more than 62,000 parent members across Australia. We seek to ensure that the voices of parents, especially those who will be directly affected by the current proposed changes, are heard.

The Parenthood considers this inquiry a chance to demonstrate to Senators, and to the Parliament more broadly, the importance of affordable housing. With housing in Sydney for example, costing greater than 30 times what it did in 1975, and wages only rising 10 times their 1975 levels, it is clear that there is a crisis of affordability in Australia.

Yet this doesn't just affect those who are wanting to purchase property. It ripples through the private rental market, and has an effect on returns for States in publicly-owned rentals. This is not the fault of those who are renting, though the provisions in this Bill might appear to seek to punish those for whom housing is a struggle.

The NRAS, while a wonderful step in the right direction, provides for only a 20% discount on the market rental price. While this may have been adequate when it was set up, it is less so now when rents are rising at an extraordinary rate.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, "access to safe and secure housing is one of the most basic human rights."¹ Therefore, how can the provisions in this Bill be said to achieving that most basic of human rights? The Parenthood doesn't believe this Bill does.

¹ <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/projects/housing-homelessness-and-human-rights>

THE PARENTHOOD STRONGLY ADVISES COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT TO SUPPORT THIS BILL AS IT STANDS.

The Parenthood has concerns regarding the provision for automatic deduction of rents as outlined in the Bill, schedule 1. Removing the autonomy of persons in receipt of government income support payments is to remove a person's dignity. The Parenthood is concerned that the increasingly punitive treatment of those who most need our help is damaging to those people individually as much as it is to our society.

We are concerned that the additional layer of government intervention (on top of the previously announced drug testing and income management) unfairly targets certain groupings in our society, further marginalising these groups.

Those on income support need just that – support. They do not need their government to be suspicious of them, to restrict how they can spend their money, to remove their agency and in turn, their dignity.

Unexpected expenses happen and unfortunately, sometimes the cost of housing must take a back seat to an immediate need – health for example. It is not the view of The Parenthood that people should be delaying immediate needs to keep a roof over their head. The safety net is indeed failing them if that is the case.

Those who will be affected by these changes are not abstract 'numbers' – **these are real Australians with real families, whose struggles should not be used to demonise those on income support by further removing their ability to have agency over their money.**

The unintended consequences of this change will be that those who find themselves in difficult situations, particularly those escaping domestic violence, will have their ability to escape significantly reduced if rents are automatically deducted. This creates a more dangerous situation for the predominantly women and children who face this horrific circumstance.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Parenthood again thanks Senate Committee members for the opportunity to provide input and feedback to contribute to your review of the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Housing Affordability) Bill 2017*.

THE PARENTHOOD REJECTS THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO FORCEFULLY DEDUCT THE COST OF HOUSING FROM THOSE RECEIVING INCOME SUPPORT AND FURTHER, DETERMINES THAT THE 20% NRAS DISCOUNT IS NO LONGER APPROPRIATE IN THE CURRENT RENTAL MARKET.

We urge Committee members to listen to the parents of Australia. We especially urge Committee members to hear those sole parent families, struggling to give their kids the best

they can and who simply want a hand up, not constant reminders from their government that they are considered a drain on the economy.

This Bill, if passed in its current form will have devastating consequences for thousands of Australian families whose mental health will be adversely affected by the loss of dignity and agency that forced deductions will create. The Parenthood urges you to reject this Bill as it stands.

We should not be demonising and further stigmatising already vulnerable and marginalised people. We should be supporting them.

Kind regards,

Nicole Lessio
Principal Campaign Manager
The Parenthood